

**Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan****May 31, 2001****Visual Impacts Assessment**

Timber harvest methods can produce significant visual impacts on the landscape. The proximity of state forest lands to residential development, popularity of the lake by recreationists, and general topography of the planning area all affect the significance of visual impacts.

In an effort to address visual impacts, an assessment was conducted to determine:

1. visibility of state lands
2. level of visibility
3. lands projected to retain forest cover indefinitely to meet other landscape objectives (riparian buffers, unstable slope buffers, eagle nest sites)
4. lands to be considered for management techniques to reduce visual impacts.

Appendix A gives details about the assessment process and assumptions used to determine which areas have the potential for visual impacts.

A map was produced that will be used in conjunction with management techniques on an activity by activity basis (Map S-1).

Visual impacts can be addressed at both landscape and management activity levels. Dispersing timber harvests spatially and temporally will lessen the visual impacts of harvest and result in a landscape with a mosaic of different forest structures.

**Appendix A – Visual Impacts Assessment Process and Assumptions**

State trust lands are visible from a variety of locations throughout the watershed including:

- X Residences
- X Parks and trails (specifically Bloedel Donovan Park and the North Shore Trail)
- X Recreational sites (Sudden Valley golf course)
- X Boaters on the lake
- X Vehicles driving on county and city roads
- X Vehicles driving on forest roads

For the purposes of this assessment, view areas are located where there is a concentration of watershed residences. These view areas are referred to as:

- X Northshore
- X Southbay
- X Sudden Valley
- X Bloedel
- X Smith Creek
- X Geneva
- X Cain/Reed

**Modeling Steps:**

- Step 1. For computer modeling, each view area was assigned 6 view points. If any one location on state trust lands was visible from at least 5 view points within one view area, it was highlighted on the map as visible.
- Step 2. A differentiation was made between visible trust lands considered to be in the middle ground and those in the background. In most cases, the lake always occupied the foreground.
- Step 3. Areas that, in the future, are not likely to have significant management activity which would create visual impacts(riparian areas, unstable slopes) were subtracted from the highlighted area.
- Step 4. A final map was created that has state trust lands divided into three categories:
  - X ***highly visible***
  - X ***moderately visible***
  - X ***no visual impact***